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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BERLIN 000282

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/10/2019

TAGS: GM MARR MOPS NATO PREL IZ EUN ECON

SUBJECT: GERMANS SUPPORT NEW POLICY IN IRAQ

REF: A. STATE 18283

¶B. BERLIN 229

¶C. BERLIN 235

Classified By: MINISTER-COUNSELOR FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS JEFF RATHKE. RE  
ASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Post discussed the new Iraq policy with MFA contacts who responded positively to the President's announcement and the decision to reduce U.S. troop strength in Iraq. While noting concern about future stability in Iraq, MFA reps indicated possible future German support for NTM-I. Contacts also gave a brief read-out on KRG President Barzani's visit to Berlin on March 4-5, and information about German support for UNAMI projects. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) PolOff met with Klemens Semtner, head of the Iraq Unit at the MFA on March 5 to discuss ref A points. Semtner reacted positively to the announcement overall. He noted that the specifics of the new policy were not a surprise, as it "perfectly" combined the President's pre-election pledge to reduce troop levels with military demands in Iraq. He called the U.S. surge strategy a "welcome success" and said the timeline for withdrawal was "appropriate." Semtner also noted that a footprint of up to 50,000 U.S. soldiers remained "significant," agreeing that much work remains to be done to ensure Iraqi security forces are able to defend the country. When asked why FM Steinmeier did not make a public statement regarding the new policy, Semtner demurred.

¶3. (SBU) Semtner wondered how concerned the U.S. is that insurgents will simply wait until January 1, 2012 to renew attacks in Iraq. He also asked how the new Iraq policy aims to resolve refugee issues, particularly since Germany has begun accepting up to 2500 Iraqi refugees currently residing in Syria and Jordan. Semtner asked what the Administration will do to politically reintegrate Iraq into the region. Regarding Kirkuk, Semtner wondered how the U.S. intends to help resolve the matter, noting that Germany's Friedrich Naumann Foundation is active in addressing issues related to Kirkuk's status. He also asked why reference to the Strategic Agreement, which the previous Administration heavily touted, has been removed from the White House website. Semtner then pointed out that Germany is interested in increasing its role in the International Compact with Iraq (ICI), should it be reinvigorated. Finally, Semtner asked whether either Secretary Clinton or President Obama would be visiting Iraq in the coming months.

¶4. (C) PolOff again pressed Semtner regarding the need for additional German support for NTM-I, noting that Steinmeier's recent visit and offer to "invest" in Iraq reminded many how Germany has not done much to support Iraq during the post-war transition period (Ref B, Ref C). Semtner indicated that, in

fact, there are those working "quietly" in the GOG to examine future active support for German participation in NTM-I.

COMMENT: While Post does not expect any announcements prior to the German elections in September, this is the first time a contact has noted that movement is possible. Post will continue to follow up on this matter. END COMMENT.

¶ 15. (U) Semtner then noted that the MFA planned to announce a three million Euro German contribution to the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (signed in Baghdad with UNAMI representatives March 7) to foster dialogue and address unresolved conflicts among ethnic and religious groups in Iraq. The project will provide training and host conferences for political representatives and local NGOs committed to reconciliation in areas of Iraq subject to ethnic disputes, for example in and around Kirkuk where Arab, Kurdish, Turkmen, Christian, and Yazidi groups reside.

¶ 16. (C) Semtner then switched to President of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Masoud Barzani's visit to Berlin March 4-5. Barzani met with Chancellor Merkel and FM Steinmeier to discuss economic cooperation, political stabilization and other development efforts. According to Semtner, the situation of Christians and other religious minorities in the Kurdish region was also on the agenda. He noted that Barzani seemed to have "received the message" that Iraq will soon be expected to stand on its own two feet, and that Barzani expressed "ideas to ensure the Iraqi government is prepared." The visit came just three weeks after FM Steinmeier formally opened a new German Consulate General in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdish region, where the Germans

BERLIN 00000282 002 OF 002

have had a diplomatic presence since April 2008.

¶ 17. (C) COMMENT: Steinmeier, the SPD candidate for Chancellor in the September 2009 national elections, is always cautious in examining German engagement in Iraq. While opposition to "boots-on-the-ground" remains, a crack in Germany's stubborn adherence to this policy may be developing -- possibly as Steinmeier looks to develop relations with the new U.S. Administration. Post will continue to work closely with the German government to increase German engagement in Iraq. END COMMENT.

Koenig